

Interview with Fred Crabtree
conducted by Linda Byrne for the
Providence District History Project Providence Perspective
Tuesday, May 26, 2009

Linda: I am Linda Byrne and I am here at the home of Fred Crabtree 9739 Five Oaks Road in Fairfax; and I am talking with Fred for the purposes of our Providence Perspective Oral History Project. How are you Fred?

Fred: How old now – let's see 93.

Linda: You are going to be 93? Oh you don't look 93.

Fred: I was just ninety three in November. Wasn't just it's getting back to 94.

Linda: Well tell me about how you came to live here in Fairfax County.

Fred: Well okay. Here in Washington as I say I worked in Drug Stores doing soda work and things like that. And finally I met a girl and we got married and was getting along real good and we got in an argument I think and we got a divorce. And so in the meantime I had not – I had only gone to about the 8th grade and so I wanted to finish school. So I started to go into night school but that didn't work out too good so I just went back to working at the drug store. So when the army came along they, of course I was just about the right age then for the army and I went in and stayed four years in the army.

Linda: What year would that have been?

Fred: Ah, I'd say that would be about 1942 or 1943.

Linda: So you were living in Washington, D.C.

Fred: Yeah, I was living in Washington all this time. So I tried to get back into school and I was in the seventh grade and I did get back there and stayed a while. And that wasn't working out too good because I wasn't

making enough money to eat and a few other things and so I said well heck. My mother had moved to New York so I went up to New York and stayed there with her quite a bit and came back to Washington here. And got a job and went to work and ah with a brewing company because I had known a little bit about the brewery work. And I worked at the brewery here for quite a while and finally the brewery closed.

Linda: Do you remember the name of that brewery?

Fred: Heurich brewing company.

Linda: What was it?

Fred: Heurich H-e-u-r-i-c-h. How long have you lived here?

Linda: Well, I was born and raised in Washington, D.C.

Fred: you were born in D.C.

Linda: Yes.

Fred: Well you know the brewery was near the water, right down from the Lincoln Memorial. That was Heurich Rankin and I worked there a long time. Went to school got back and went to some night schools and got a fairly different in education.

The night schools, I don't remember the name of them. There were two or three of them I went to. And I did get a little bit of learning. But anyway that was and then I met my wife and we moved - well when I got out of the army I met my wife and we. Now wait a minute. No – I was in the army when I met, yes I was so then when I got out of the army we came back and moved down near where the brewery was and stayed there. And then of course when the army came along why – went out to Ft. Myer – was drafted and they sent me overseas. And that's about all except what you know or want to know here.

Linda: Well you moved to Fairfax County about what. When did you move to Fairfax County?

Fred: Ah—I would say went in the army – when did the war end it was the forties it was forty two or forty three I think so. No we got out in forty four so – I was in four years so it was in the forties when I got out of the army; married and then I came out to live near Ft. Myer, right near the Fort. And we were getting along pretty good and I was still working at the brewery. But it got so bad with the bugle all day long.

Linda: At Ft. Myer?

Fred: laughing – I had to move. We had to move out of the house and we moved out to Jefferson Village; and we live there oh, I would say about eight years and then we moved here and bought this place.

Linda: So you've been here in this house a long time.

Fred: Yeah. I would say before I went in the service about ten years now. I tend to stay here. And what happened was – one day I got a call from a fellow and he says “Fred you’ve been all around here in Washington, I mean Northern Virginia here for a couple of years” and he says “and I know you know a little – a lot of people” (cause I got mixed up with Little League when we were here). Then I knew everybody in the area – and that’s one reason I had been able to acquire quite a bit of property to the Park Authority because I knew many people.

Linda: Well that’s something we really want to talk about. You’re known as Mr. Baseball.

Fred: Yes.

Linda: And you have also been on the Park Authority; you were on the Park Authority for quite some time.

Fred: Yes ahuh. Well I guess about ten or eleven years – seems to me like, I don't know for sure. You've got to check on that; I'm almost sure it was about 10 years.

Linda: Well in 1986 I see you created the Elli Doyle Park Service Award which recognizes a citizen or groups which contribute to service to the Park Authority. And you were honored by the National Association of County Parks and Recreation for your work as an outstanding public official. You've been affectionally known in Fairfax County as Mr. Baseball for your roll in founding the Boy's and Girl's Little League of Vienna, Virginia.

And I understand you also established the Challenge Program which is quite something here in Fairfax County for students who want to play baseball.

Tell me a little about the Challenge Program.

Fred: Well, the Challenge Program – I wouldn't really call it a Challenge Program. But one of the main things that I did was get the Little League to put in - What happened they called me and said, the president called me and said, he was the president also of the Club down in Washington (what do you call these clubs). I started to join myself.

Linda: Boy's Club?

Fred: No, it wasn't a Boy's Club this was grown own clubs. It's an old club – well there's the ring.

Linda: Oh, that's a Masonic ring.

Fred: Yeah, I joined the Masons. So well then I got to be pretty well known, because I was starting baseball and kept playing all around and every year when you would win a championship you would meet the other hampions. And I got to know hundreds and hundreds of people – gosh I don't even know where to start.

Linda: Where did your interest in baseball come from?

Fred: Oh, when I was a kid when I stayed with my mother, yeah my mother she – I played baseball with the kids across the street. Then I got to be pretty good and I came up here and the first thing I wanted to do was to play baseball. But they were a little bit too strong for me, I wasn't quite old enough. But anyway, I did join the Lions Club and had been in there quite a while, I'd say about 10 or 15 years but where I got to be is – I got a call from this fellow one day who says Fred we've got a little league here in the program and this is what I've mainly done (this is mainly most of what you want to know). When I started in Little League they wanted a president, the other president had to leave and so I took the job because I had moved down to Jefferson Village – you know where that is?

Linda: Yes

Fred: Well we moved there and just doing real nice and so anyway ah my wife died.

Linda: Oh, I'm so sorry.

Fred: And so we had moved out here (his current home) but anyway that sort of upset everything. But anyway I went ahead because I have a young man, a son and I have all kind of grandchildren now and they're all over the place. And he was in the Navy several years and then just about two years ago my wife died there in the hallway.

Linda: Oh, I'm sorry.

Fred: She had a stroke. And that's the most miserable thing I've seen in my life – poor girl. She was good, she got a job and we were doing real good in church and everything else. Becoming hopefully I thought good citizens. And so anyway I was elected president of the Little League a couple of years later. And the first thing I noticed was that we didn't have enough parks because the parks that we had were nothing. There just weren't much to them. So I started going around looking to see what I could find talking to people and you got to know a lot of people thru their kids you know.

So finally I met a guy and he told me about some property that I might be able to get and then I got that.

Linda: Was that the Yeonas family? Was that the Yeonas family?

Fred: Yes

Linda: Would that have been around 1952?

Fred: That's exactly, that's about right, yeah. In fact Mr. Yeonas was here and I saw him –hit me upside the head. We had opening day, you know, just recently and he was there, yeah. He ah – I got that piece of land for us.

Linda: What is your secret; you've obtained land for the Park Authority and for Little League and other things?

Fred: You see I got that for Little League; I hadn't gotten on the Park Authority at that time and so I got another piece for Little League and then I got another piece. So then I got a call one night and this fellow says Fred you know what the Park Authority is and I says yeah right – we play on some of their land. And he says would you like to become a member and I said well sure. So I got on there and I just kept on going looking for land. And you know when you know a lot of people. This one lady she was the most wonderful person I think I've ever known. Her name was ah dog-gone it – well anyway I'll think of it in a minute. She owned a piece of property over here in Vienna on this side of Vienna. Then one day I stopped in the house to see her and she was there by herself. And she had a maid and she was still running the house but she had the most valuable house on land that the Park Authority owns.

Linda: Is that Nottoway Park?

Fred: No

Linda: No – which one is that?

Fred: This was new ah – are you on the Park Authority?

Linda: No, I'm not.

Fred: Oh, I thought you were.

Linda: No

Fred: Well anyway, this piece was about oh, a nice wooded area about seven or eight acres – which I would guess – maybe a little more than that. And then some other things she had but in there in years. Her and her husband worked down at the museum part of the government. And they were bringing in new furniture – antiques and all this kind of stuff. And she and I got to be good friends. Mr. Mastenbrook, I took him down then took John and introduced him. So finally, finally, the only thing she really wanted me to do was bring her a little wine every once in a while. And I always would bring a bottle of wine. She never got drunk or anything but she would sip that wine and then come back. She'd have it a month I guess and she and I got to be good friends.

Fred: Every time I went there I took her out to dinner the first thing. And when she died she told me - she says I want you to tell me if I give the land to the Park Authority that they won't sell it and do something else with it.

Well I got in a pretty good argument with the – well not an argument a discussion with the Chairman at that time. He had no problems with it you know and we talked with some of the members of the Board of Supervisors – and they felt like they would never have to sell it but they couldn't guarantee it with somebody coming along anyway we got it and we got all the land and the house. The house they thought was with the lady who is the Mayor of Vienna. Do you know her name?

Linda: Jane Seeman

Fred: Yeah that's the other thing – she thinks I'm the greatest guy in the world. She goes out to that place all the time and we got to be good friends. And so if you just keep um circulating.

Linda: Do you remember the name of the Park?

Fred: I don't think they just use her name. I think that what – I don't know if they have a name for it or not. When you get a chance someday – you know where it is?

Linda: No, tell me.

Fred: Go over there and go thru it.

Linda: Where, where is it?

Fred: huh

Linda: Where is it? What is the location?

Fred: Ah, it's so far back in the woods. Well you go up here to Vienna and you take the main drag and just as you get out to the main drag you turn left and you go back in there and oh about two miles from her house – about two miles altogether – it takes you right down to the railroad tracks. Well her house and all was on as soon as you turn off the main road ah, ah, God I wish I knew the name of that street. I don't know the name of that street.

Linda: Beulah Road?

Fred: huh?

Linda: Not Beulah Road?

Fred: Well no – it's out there near Beulah its right close to Beulah.

Linda: Church Street?

Fred: Well no it's not Church. You go all the way out about two miles. If you get down there in Vienna – do you know where the recreation department is?

Linda: Yes

Fred: Where the recreation department is on the main street, you can turn right there and go right up to the recreation department. But go down about another 2 blocks and turn left off of the main drag and you go out about a mile and you come to a nice big sharp road that goes back and

Linda: I know the one you are talking about, they now have a beautiful – they have a pond there and do they – people can have weddings?

Fred: I haven't been there in about 6 months; I don't know what they've got there now. But if you come over here one day

Linda: I'll have to go back to the office and look that up. I should remember the name. Yes, I know what you are talking about. But you were on the Park Authority Board from 1962 to 1992.

Fred: Sixty two, seventy two, eighty two, ninety two – 30 years huh.

Linda: You were - yes. And you were very instrumental in acquiring and expanding the number of park facilities that we have here. Tell me about Nottoway Park and how you convinced them to do

Fred: Nottoway Park.

Linda: Yes

Fred: Oh, I'll tell you about Nottoway Park. The first thing I'll tell you as far as Nottoway Park is when I got the park I got to talking to the Park Authority members asking them what they thought would be a good name you know. And so we kicked it around and kicked it around and it died and it came back again and I says to one member I says look I want to – look there's nothing around here named after the Indians – that's exactly what I said. And everybody says yeah, on the Board says sounds alright Fred.

And so I says well there's a tribe of Indians that were here years ago that lived in this area and I says it was called Nottoway Indians. So we named it Nottoway Park. Laughing – that's the God's truth, that's just the way it happened and the park has been to? But let me tell you how we got it.

Linda: Yes

Fred: There was a fellow named (trying to remember) they all know his name, well I'll think of it in a minute. His kid was on my baseball team and so one day he came over and he says Francis I've got a piece of land over here he says and it isn't just what I want and he says I would be willing to let it go if you could make a deal with me with the Park Authority. I said oh yeah we won't have any trouble making a deal with you see. So his wife didn't want to move and so and his boy was just about finished with his little league program. So we met one night and ah set out there on the front porch he says well I'll tell you what he says I've got this piece of land here and I got this piece up here belongs to a church over in Baltimore and he says let's see who the other piece belong to – ah heck who did – maybe I'll think of it in a minute we'll go on – it was three pieces all together.

So started out and ah he says my deal is I want I believe it was close to 75 or 80 thousand dollars. You'd have to check that out, it's on the records at the Park Authority. But anyway I forget it was three and over in Baltimore owned a piece of it – the church over there. And so worked with all three of them until we got them and we went down and took the property over. But with the understanding, that's what I had with the Park Authority we would put ball fields in there – right – and they all agreed and we got three beautiful ball fields. And ah that's mostly – I didn't mind it wasn't died in the wool ball fields; I like that it was like Leighly's property that old lady

Linda: Mrs. Leighly she owned which property?

Fred: The Leighly property, she was the one with the husband who worked for the bureau of - I told you a while ago what it was.

Linda: um hum

Fred: Where they have all the idols and statues and everything else. And he had already died about a year or two before that. So I got that just in the nick of time. And the way that happened is – a fellow told me – and he was one of the guys in Little League. Francis – I know this lady overhere and he says she is about dead and I think if you go over there and introduce yourself you might be able to buy that property. So I couldn't wait to get over there and I went over there and went in and asked she was sweeping the door and she looks up and sees me and she starts "what can I do for you" – she scared me. But anyway I went there and my son would come over and we would shovel the snow for her. We done everything for a couple of years for the house. And when she died she – who's our history – what's his name? Park Authority – he's in charge of history – you don't know who he is

Linda: hum

Fred: Michael, Mike, he runs the history division of the Park Authority.

Linda: Oh, I'm not familiar with his name.

Fred: Mike

Linda: I should know it.

Fred: I forget his name. You getting all this.

Linda: I am. I'm getting all this. Back to Nottoway Park now Nottoway you convinced the owners

Fred: All three owners.

Linda: All three owners to sell that to the Park Authority.

Fred: Yes.

Linda: What years would that have been? Somewhere in the seventies I think.

Fred: Just about yeah. The records are there at the Park Authority, I don't know what the record is.

Linda: Well I use to horseback ride all thru there.

Fred: You use to do what?

Linda: Horseback ride thru Nottoway before they built Route 66.

Fred: You know the most famous thing about that Park now you know what it is – think a minute – think – you're old enough to know exactly what I'm – you know the guy who was in so much trouble (he is referring to Robert Hanssen former American FBI agent who spied for Soviet and Russian intelligence Services for more than 20 years] with the government about something he had hidden in a ditch out there at the Park in one of the ditches.

Linda: My goodness no

Fred: What the heck was his name, he's still in jail. The whole family broke the whole family up and he's still in jail. I think he got life. He didn't kill anybody but he had done something – I don't know what it was. Stolen something

Linda: And he buried it in a ditch out there at Nottoway?

Fred: Buried in a ditch and then he told them where it was. And I says to myself wow passed by that place every – ten times a day.

Linda: Oh, my goodness.

Fred: Yeah, and I know exactly the ditch he's talking about too. If you come into the Park and you're driving down the driveway after you get about two blocks into the Park. There's a ditch that comes across and he buried it

under the bridge over there in the ditch by the bridge inside the Park there. He buried it there and that's where he kept it at. And his wife and all they left him. I guess they did since he had – but I think he got life in prison.

Linda: What years would that have been?

Fred: What

Linda: Do you remember when that was?

Fred: It's been at least 25 years ago. You can go to the newspaper pretty quick and find out.

Linda: I'll have to do that, yes.

Fred: He hid it in that bridge there all those years ago.

Linda: I remember an airplane an old part of an airplane that was parked there at Nottoway Park before it was a park. Part of an old airplane

Fred: Don't remember that.

Linda: No

Fred: That must have been after me. When I got the land I know was in there two ball fields. Now we got three.

Linda: Now tell me if you could give anyone instruction on how to get people to donate land to our Fairfax County Park Authority – what's your secret.

Fred: What's been so good about it is I knew a lot of people see. So like I told you another guy comes to me and his name was Mr. Mike – Mike's his first name and he said Fred there's a fellow down here who's a friend of mine – no this is in Reston – and he is trying to get rid of a piece of land. He bought the piece of land and he found out that it had – he wanted to put houses on it – but he didn't know that it was a what do you call um some

kind of stay thing that the government had already said that that house could be only used for something for the government I guess it was. And they told him absolutely no. He bought the property and everything and then he found out that they hadn't started using it. But they had built it now what they got a girls baseball team. Laughing I wasn't short of getting a baseball team again.

Linda: That's good, I see where – Let's see it was um recently it was a Park named after you. It's called the Fred Crabtree Park. It's in the Fox Mill area.

Fred: It's called the what?

Linda: Fred Crabtree Park.

Fred: Yeah that's over there you know where the Park Authority building is?

Linda: Yes.

Fred: When you cross there you go up and turn to the right and go toward Reston. After you get down there about half a mile there's a big piece of land there.

Linda: That would be in the Hunter Mill District.

Fred: Huh

Linda: The Hunter Mill District. That would be in the Hunter Mill District.

Fred: I think it would yeah.

Linda: Yes

Fred: The way that happened – a friend of mine told me about the property.

Fred: He said I think you can get it; but my family's buried there. So I'll tell you about it if you will leave my family there. Laughing

Linda: So there's a family cemetery on the property.

Fred: There's a family cemetery on the property.

Linda: Wow.

Fred: We go right by the ah, the ah – you're going to have to come over here one day and you and I ride around. I think it would be better and then you can see exactly and I can name. Could you do that you think?

Linda: I think we could do that. Bring a camera and we can photograph.

Fred: So many, yeah I was just nailing land all over. Then this other fellow says to – a friend of mine over here – ah let's see maybe I told you about – this was out in Reston. He says I says what about it – he says well it would be nice for a ball field. So I went over and looked at it and said boy sure would. So I went right back to the Park Authority and found out that a man had bought the property but he had the same problem that the other people had. He couldn't – maybe I told you about this already – the guy, the government owned the property and of course they wouldn't let him have it. I think I told you about that piece.

Linda: Now tell me for people who would be moving here now – how has this area changed over the years.

Fred: This area right here?

Linda: um hum

Fred: When I bought this house here it was one more house here was for sale. And we bought this one here and we've liked it and my wife loved this place and she was working for the hospital at that time.

Linda: Where were you working?

Fred: Huh

Linda: Where were you working then?

Fred: I was working at the let's see. I had gotten my own company I was working for Schlitz Brewing Company. What happened was a friend of mine was a salesman for the Brewery and he got promoted to the Home Brewery in Milwaukee and he came down here and saw what I was doing with this Schlitz Brewery beer. I put in a lot of new things and everything else and we were doing a lot better than the other guy had done because he had just about given up. He wasn't doing anything. So I sold the property and got this money got this and some other pieces. That's where I got my money and just about lost it all when they well.

Linda: You've seen a lot of changes here in traffic and congestion.

Fred: Traffic. Do you know I was in the hospital – let's see – when I fell down the steps they put me in the hospital and I was there about five months. And they finally let me out and I came home here but I had to go back for another month. And everything's about right and I about ready to go into the back yard now.

Linda: Good. You really hurt yourself when you fell down those steps.

Fred: Well you know what – I'm going to tell you this and I don't want you to forget it. This is odd but it's the truth- let's see how that happened. Oh, I was coming up the steps with three books in my hands. My wife was reading these books and she was in bed. And just as I got to the top a white light about that wide and that long (3 inches by 3 feet) sheusss (motions that it sent sailing by) made noise. I fell all the way down from the top step.

Linda: Oh my goodness.

Fred: Cut my head all up and broke my leg these places (three places). I said my lord I don't know what I've done to deserve this until I found out what was wrong and I have been working on it.

Linda: Well, you look good. No one would ever guess you're 93 years old.

Fred: I feel good. Yeah but I know I'm getting old – I'm not going to be here much longer.

Linda: Well we hope that you are. Now, this is a good place to live Fairfax County right?

Fred: The best place I've ever lived, it is the greatest place. In fact one of the nurses came in here the other day and her and her husband live down there next to Ft. Myer. So I forgot to tell you that. Anyway she wanted to drive the car around and get me out of the house; so she drove down to her house which is near Ft. Myer. And I forgot about Ft. Myer and when I moved out of Washington I moved to FT. Myer first because there was residents around it and that was like being in the army. Every morning they blow the course of the bugle and every noon they'd blow it and every breakfast they'd blow it. And then every time somebody died they'd blow the horn again. I think gees – we moved out here that was the reason we moved.

Linda: Now how many children do you have?

Fred: Ah, let's see Ricky and Joyce Ann that's all two.

Linda: Ah huh.

Fred: She, she Ricky worked – he was in the Navy about five years I guess altogether and then – my sister she worked at one of the hospitals, I mean my daughter she worked at the hospital. And you just about got I don't know if you are going to be able to remember anything but you do have something on it.

Linda: I have it all here; this little recorder.

Fred: I feel like if I tell you the good things I certainly should tell you about the bad things. But I wasn't, I don't think I was treated right.

Linda: Where was this?

Fred: Huh?

Linda: Where were you not treated right.

Fred: Oh, right here in the County. I had some bad treatment that I didn't think was fair but I've forgotten about it.

Linda: That's good.

Fred: Huh?

Linda: That's good to move on.

Fred: Yeah I don't worry about it anymore – just let it go.

Linda: Now, you have grandchildren?

Fred: Huh?

Linda: You have grandchildren?

Fred: Oh, yeah.

Linda: How many?

Fred: Oh, let's see – gad – all of them move out of this area. OH my daughter, she's in New York. All of them have moved out of this area my daughter she is in New York. No Ricky my son, he's a good boy he was in the Navy several years. He lives about five miles out this way. When you go straight out you go up this way and turn and you go through Leesburg.

My great grandson he's doing real good. He's got a good business going, he's done real good. I think I sort of talked him into that

Linda: You have a great grandson, you have great grandchildren.

Fred: Yeah I do I got seven.

Linda: Seven great grandchildren.

Fred: I have several - oh yeah.

Linda: That's wonderful. Well I thank you very much for this interview.

Fred: I don't know if that's what you really want. But I wanted to be honest about everything.

Linda: Well this is great, hearing about all the parks and what you have done and how you

Fred: Well we set here and don't start thinking I'm a great guy.

Linda: Well you are a great guy. I talked to who is it Fred – let's see. Fred, I talked to Frank Blackstone.

Fred: Who

Linda: Frank Blackstone from Little League.

Fred: Yeah,

Linda: And boy they sing your praises. You are Mr. Baseball.

Fred: Yeah, I'll go around to the games and watch them

Linda: Good.

Fred: Sometimes.

Linda: Thank you.

Part 2

I'm Linda Byrne and I am here with Fred Crabtree and he would like to tell you about his plan after 30 years of serving on the Park Authority Board we're now – he served from 1962 to 1992. Now we are in 2009 and here's his plan for the Park Authority.

Fred: There's more land becoming available everyday and I see it and I think someone should be trying to acquire some more land. What we have now is not going to last forever and I really feel like that someone should go out and start trying to get some land.

I said a side thing and we ought to be getting it. And now I don't know how the Park Authority – where I don't know well I don't know how the County feels about it. They might say wait a minute we can't allocate any money for land when we got to buy so many new bridges and roads and that might be what they are going to say in front of we will. But you know I would hope that they would still try to keep their eye on getting some property. There's a lot of property further out but I know we don't want to go too far but we're getting more mobile all the time. It don't take long to get any place.

Linda: Thank you.

Fred: Okay.